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## ONA Blossoms in the “Heart of Dixie”



# Open and Affirming

In the Southeast, where gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered often feel alone and marginalized, a revolution is underway. But it is a quite peaceful one: Christian communities within our Southeast Conference of the UCC are declaring an alternative to the seemingly indigenous homophobia of traditional Southern religion. And nowhere has the growth of the **UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns** “Open and Affirming” program taken hold so strongly lately than the state of Alabama!

Birmingham's [Pilgrim Church](#) was the first Alabama UCC to adopt the platform, all the way back in 2001. But it would be six more years before one of its neighbors in town, [Beloved Community Church](#), did the same. Elsewhere in the Conference's territory, 13 congregations in other states had already done so by then, with Tennessee alone having seven of them. There was, needless to say, a lot a catching up to do!

However, 2014 has seen Alabama's total of ONA churches more than double in the space of just eight weeks! First, in February, [Open Table UCC](#) in Mobile was recognized for the vote it had taken as a new church start after its 2010 founding (Open Table was granted full UCC membership in April 2013). Then, two weeks after Mobile, another of our new and thriving churches, [Covenant Community UCC](#) in Center Point (outside Birmingham), gained recognition for what pastor J. R. Finney said had always been the heart of its life: a welcome to all, regardless of condition and especially sexual orientation. Finally, in April, one of the Conference's "heritage" churches (and stalwart pillars) made the move after about a year and a half of study and discussion: [United Church of Huntsville](#).

All those recognitions by the Coalition brings the total of ONA UCC congregations in Alabama to five, out of the 16 total churches we have in the "Heart of Dixie." Over all, though, of the 54 full member churches in the SEC, 19 of them are ONA, over one-third of the roster! The Conference is grateful to God for the Spirit and witness these actions have demonstrated to their respective communities and prays for growth elsewhere in inclusion and hospitality!

As a side note, courtesy of the Coalition and Mike Stroud, director of the Conference's [Project 66-16 history initiative](#), here is a listing, in sequential order, of the Conference's ONA churches.

**Legend:** national number, Conference order, church, date of recognition.

145 (SEC 1), [Brookmeade Congregational UCC](#), Nashville, TN, November 19, 1994

231 (SEC 2), [Pilgrimage UCC](#), Marietta, GA, December 8, 1997

268 (SEC 3), [Circular Congregational UCC](#), Charleston, SC, February 3, 1999

380 (SEC 4), [Pilgrim UCC](#), Birmingham, AL, May 8, 2001

412 (SEC 5), Grace UCC, Crossville, TN, February 8, 2002\*

418 (SEC 6), [Church of the Savior UCC](#), Knoxville, TN, April 25, 2002

463 (SEC 7), [Pilgrim Congregational UCC](#), Chattanooga, TN, June 9, 2003

490 (SEC 8), [Central Congregational UCC](#), Atlanta, GA, March 20, 2004

529 (SEC 9), [United Church \(UCC\)](#), Cookeville, TN, November 30, 2004

531 (SEC 10), [Church of the Savior UCC](#), Roswell, GA, December 14, 2004

535 (SEC 11), [Virginia-Highland Church \(Baptist/UCC\)](#), Atlanta, GA, January 17, 2005

618 (SEC 12), [Holy Trinity Community UCC](#), Nashville, TN, May 2, 2006

630 (SEC 13), [Garden of Garden UCC](#), Columbia, SC, July 7, 2006

650 (SEC 14), [Community UCC](#), Pleasant Hill, TN, December 11, 2006

- 663 (SEC 15), [Beloved Community UCC](#), Birmingham, AL, February 27, 2007
- 936 (SEC 16), [Peace Congregational UCC](#), Clemson, SC, September 29, 2008
- 1065 (SEC 17), [Safe Harbor Family UCC](#), Flowood, MS, January 11, 2013
- 1166 (SEC 18), [Open Table UCC](#), Mobile, AL, February 10, 2014
- 1172 (SEC 19), [Covenant Community](#), Center Point, AL, February 23, 2014
- 1177 (SEC 20), [United Church \(UCC\)](#), Huntsville, AL, April 7, 2014

\*—Grace UCC closed in 2008, but is listed for the historical record.

NOTE: Pensacola UCC and Praxis UCC voted to become ONA at their inception and will receive the Coalition's recognition when it moves from new church start status to full membership in the Conference in the future.

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